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Consequences for playing down

Football teams playing down a classification will be ineligible for postseason

By NIK STRENG
The Oregonian

SALEM — A new topic of discussion by the Oregon School Activities Association's Football Ad Hoc Committee could have far-reaching effects on the state's football teams.

During its Jan. 5 meeting, the committee held discussion on a potential policy that would make football teams playing down a classification ineligible to compete in postseason play.

Also in this discussion:

Games against teams playing down will be part of the ranking system and teams playing down will be in the OSAA rankings.

Teams playing down could be able to schedule an endowment game at the end of the regular season, providing a postseason experience for the teams.

Players and coaches that are on teams that are playing down will be eligible for all-league, all-state and other postseason honors.

Potentially changing to an annual review for teams that are playing down.

The topic was only discussed by the football ad hoc committee, and nothing has been finalized. Its next meeting will be on Jan. 19.

Currently, the OSAA allows a football team the option to petition to play down a classification if the team has an in-class winning percentage of 22% or less over the previous two years. The ability to play down



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Enterprise quarterback Jackson Decker (22) hands off the ball to running back Gunnar McDowell (44) during the first half Sept. 9, 2021, against the Rockets in Pilot Rock. A new proposal would mean Oregon high school football teams that play down a classification, such as 2A Pilot Rock playing 1A Enterprise, could not compete in postseason play.

a classification theoretically allows for more success as teams rebuild programs.

But what happens when teams that are playing down are too strong in their new classification? In the fall 2021 football season, 12 teams that played down competed in the postseason: Canby and McKay in 5A, North Eugene in 4A, Siuslaw, Junction City and Philomath in 3A, Gold Beach, Waldport, Lost River, Bonanza, Enterprise and Myrtle Point in 1A.

Siuslaw, a 4A school, won the 3A state championship in 2021. It marked the second time in a row where a team from a 4A school competed in the 3A championship game.

"I am not sure if that is really a fair situation," said South Umpqua coach Steve Stebbins, whose Lancers lost to Siuslaw in the 3A championship game. "I was very interested when OSAA came out with this plan and am going to be very interested to see where it goes."

Stebbins said he is of two minds about the OSAA's playing down rules. He said his first coaching job was in Vancouver on a team that would have benefitted greatly from playing down. But he said it's clear that issues have been created as a result of the policy.

And one of the keys, Stebbins said, is that football is a sport dependent on numbers and numbers can

fluctuate a lot at smaller schools.

"And you really just need one large class with some talent, and you can make a run with a few pieces around them," he said.

Stebbins added he could see schools losing some incentive to play down if playoffs are not an option. He said those coaches would have to sell the endowment game as the play-off alternative, but it wouldn't be too hard of a job.

"I do see that if you tell teams that they are ineligible for the postseason it may stop a few programs from opting down," he said. "Yet at the same time, if you are truly trying to turn your program around, you have a discussion with your parents

and boosters and explain what you are doing, and it could be a positive."

Even though they were opponents on the field in November, Siuslaw coach Sam Johnson agreed with Stebbins.

Johnson, who has been the coach for three years, said he is against teams playing down in general.

"One of the biggest things would be just leaving the schools alone," Johnson said. The decision to have the Vikings play in 3A was in motion before Johnson arrived in Siuslaw and Johnson knew the team would be good this fall.

As a school, Siuslaw will be moving down to 3A next year.

Johnson added that he is not in support of making teams playing down ineligible for postseason play.

"It doesn't make a lot of sense to me," he said. "To punish the kids by making them miss the postseason."

While Canby will not have to think about this discussion — the school will be dropping to 5A next year — the Cougars are one team that has benefitted from playing down. Head coach Jimmy Joyce said play-offs were not a factor in the team's decision to play in 5A.

"While some people may have focused on this issue in retrospect, in December 2019, our concern was on what was best for our players, school, and community," Joyce wrote in an email to *The Oregonian/OregonLive*. "When we made the decision to pursue the move to 5A, our goal was to revitalize our program and help regain our footing as a proud football community."

Since moving to 5A, Joyce said Canby has been moving in the right direction.

"Participation numbers are way up, pride in football has returned to the school and community, and yes we made the playoffs and won a play-off game," he said. "But honestly, that is just a small part of why I feel we did the right thing."

OSAA committee nixes 9-man

By NIK STRENG
The Oregonian

SALEM — Just weeks after proposing to revamp football at the Class 2A and 1A level, the Oregon School Activities Association's Football Ad Hoc Committee has backpedaled.

On Jan. 7, the committee announced it was supporting a model where 2A football teams would compete in 11-man football, while 1A teams would play eight-man football (or six-man for the smallest 1A schools). The reversal means little will change with how small-school football in Oregon has been run.

The committee's recommendation still faces a vote by the OSAA Executive Board.

The change will not prevent teams from playing in nine-man competition, the update reads, but these games will be scheduled between schools.

The committee also formally supported adoption of six-man football as an OSAA sport. The committee's recommendation will need to first be supported by the OSAA's State Championship Committee before going



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

lone Arlington's Cedrick Dayandante (40) runs the ball April 8, 2021, during the lone/Arlington Cardinals 60-14 loss to the Pilot Rock Rockets in Pilot Rock. Oregon School Activities Association's Football Ad Hoc Committee on Jan. 7, 2022, announced it backed off a proposal for nine-man football for smaller high schools.

to the executive board.

On Dec. 20, the ad hoc committee made a recommendation of a new 2A and 1A hybrid classification. This would combine Oregon's 2A and 1A schools into three groups: a nine-man football Division 1 classification mostly made of 2A teams, a nine-man football Division 2 classification made of smaller 2A teams and bigger 1A teams, and a six-man football classification for the smaller 1A programs.

During that meeting, Nestucca head coach Jeff Schiewe said that 2A programs would prefer to play nine-man football over eight-man, which is currently only played at the 1A level. However, during a Jan. 5 meeting of the ad hoc committee, representatives from 1A's Adrian and Powder Valley schools voiced their concerns over a potential change to nine-man football.

The next meeting of the football ad hoc committee will be Jan. 19.

ON THE SLATE

5:30 p.m.
Grant Union at Weston-McEwen, 6 p.m.

Prep boys wrestling
Pendleton at Southridge Tournament, TBD
Hermiston at Ellensburg Tournament, 9 a.m.

College women's basketball
BMCC at Wenatchee Valley, 2 p.m.
EOU at Evergreen State, 3 p.m.

College men's basketball
BMCC at Wenatchee Valley, 4 p.m.

College women's wrestling
EOU at Oregon Wrestling Classic, Redmond, 11:45 a.m.

MONDAY, JAN. 17

Prep boys basketball
Umatilla vs. Douglas at MLK YODA Tour-

nament, Harrisburg, 1:30 p.m.

College women's basketball
BMCC vs. Northern Idaho, 2 p.m.

College men's basketball
BMCC vs. Northern Idaho, 4 p.m.

TUESDAY, JAN. 18

Prep boys basketball
Huntington at Long Creek/Ukiah, 4:30 p.m.
Elgin at Nixyaawii, 5 p.m.
Pilot Rock at Enterprise, 6:30 p.m.
Weston-McEwen at Heppner, 7:30 p.m.
Irrigon at Riverside, 7:30 p.m.

Prep girls basketball
Pilot Rock at Enterprise, 5 p.m.
Echo at Condon, 6 p.m.
Weston-McEwen at Heppner, 6 p.m.
Irrigon at Riverside, 6 p.m.
Elgin at Nixyaawii, 6:30 p.m.

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH, THE TOUGH GET VACCINATED.

COVID fatigue is the biggest threat to keeping Oregon schools open and kids safe this winter. But, getting vaccinated is just one of 11 health and safety measures we can take to protect what's most important. Find out more at Oregon.gov/readyschools.



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